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ABSTRACT

During 1989, the administration of the New Zealand education system underwent the most dramatic change since its inception as a national system in 1889. The changes affected principals, who took on greatly expanded managerial responsibilities while continuing their traditional role of professional leadership. Principals were also responsible to the school-based board of trustees, which was composed of parents from the school community. This paper identifies key issues for principals at the introduction of the reforms and discusses trends and developments in principals' role to the present day. Issues included heavier workloads and greater stress; contentious relationships with parents, trustees, and the business community; feminist leadership styles that conflicted with the New Right political climate; the principal's role as an employer; and the principal's new political role. The tension that existed between the leadership and managerial components of the principal's role was perhaps the most problematic issue. Challenges include developing new models for professional development, resolving the debate about the nature of the curriculum and about the social and educational roles of schools, and finding ways to regulate the pace of change. (Contains 26 references.) (LMI)

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THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL: A NEW ZEALAND PERSPECTIVE

Paper presented at the

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by
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THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL : A NEW ZEALAND PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

During 1989 the administration of the New Zealand education system underwent the most dramatic change since its inception as a national system in 1889. The changes had particular implications for principals who took on greatly expanded managerial responsibilities in addition to their traditional role of professional leadership. Further, principals were responsible to the school-based board of trustees, comprising parents from the school community. The first years of the reforms were characterised by high workloads, negotiation and contestation as principals implemented the new system. Professional, legal, industrial, commercial, entrepreneurial and political factors combine in new and complex ways for the new Zealand principal, in a system dominated by New Right ideologies. Curricular reform followed closely on the heels of the earlier changes, bringing fresh responsibilities for leadership and staff development.

With reference to a longitudinal study of schools during the first year of the changes (Harold 1995) and to other research and commentary, this paper identifies key issues for principals at the introduction of the reforms, and discusses trends and developments in their role to the present day . The results of a current study into the changing role of the principal will also be discussed.

Introduction

The last decade has been characterised by unprecedented levels of administrative and curricular reform in the New Zealand education system, concurrent with what has been termed "New Right' influences in social, economic and political spheres, and what Bates (1986) identifies as the 'crisis of the state' as successive governments struggle with rising costs of previously implemented social policies.

Within the decade educational policy and practice in New Zealand has changed from that which reflected a philosophy of education as a 'public good (Grace 1990) to one where education is perceived as an 'individual benefit'. In this model the ideology of the market becomes paramount and schools are viewed as 'self-managing' institutions where practices of management and operation are borrowed from the world of business and commerce.

The purpose of this paper is to identify emerging trends for principals within the managerial framework and to illustrate the tensions and paradoxes facing New Zealand principals as they work within a system where leadership and management roles can sometimes be diametrically opposed. A brief overview of key features of the New Zealand Education system is provided followed by a discussion of principal roles during the early stages of the reforms. The

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paper goes on to discuss aspects of principals' work which have changed since the reforms began. Concluding comments raise some future challenges for principals.

The New Zealand Education System

The compulsory sector of the education system (5-16 years) is divided into two broad sectors; primary (5-12 years) and secondary (13-16). The majority of secondary students complete two further years at school. Approximately sixty percent of primary schools are small rural schools of 5 teachers or fewer, and headed by teaching principals. The remainder are situated in urban areas, and, in the larger towns and cities, are further subdivided into contributing primary (5-10) and intermediate schools (11-12). Secondary schools are situated in larger towns and cities and the largest may have up to 2000 pupils and 80 or more staff members. In more remote coastal and rural areas primary and secondary sectors are combined into Area schools. Within the state system there are 2102 primary, 144 intermediate, 48 area, and 336 secondary schools in total. All schools are required to implement a national curriculum, aspects of which are currently being rewritten and implemented.

Prior to 1989 the former local authorities, known as school committees in primary schools, and committees of management in area schools, had very limited powers and functions. The distribution of resources, the hiring and firing of teachers and the development and implementation of policy, for example, was in the hands of the regional Education Boards and the central Department of Education. State secondary schools were more autonomous than the other sectors, being administered independently by a board of governors whose powers included appointment and dismissal of staff, and responsibility for buildings. However maintenance and capital works for the secondary sector were controlled by the Education Board and boards of governors frequently sought advice from the regional authorities. New Zealand, in fact, had one of the most centralised educational administration systems in the world (McLaren, 1974). There were some advantages in this of course, especially in terms of curriculum delivery. It was often claimed that for the highly mobile rural population of the small democracy of New Zealand it was important for parents to know that whether they were living in Northland or Bluff they could be assured that their children would receive a broadly similar curriculum.

The administrative reforms of 1988/89 disestablished the former regional Education Boards and replaced them with a school-based board of trustees

comprising 5 elected parent/community representatives, the principal, a staff representative, and in the case of area and secondary schools, a student representative. The trustees took on the administrative powers of the former Education Boards, including the employment of teachers, and the responsibility for purchase of most resources (from centrally supplied funds). The development of local policy, and a school charter, were also new responsibilities.

Each school in New Zealand now operates as an autonomous institution and is provided with operational funding to cover all running costs except teacher salaries which are still controlled by the Education Ministry. The grant is based on the school roll number and is administered by the board of trustees who are responsible for all aspects of operation with the exclusion of teacher payments. The Ministry has a policy whereby schools can opt into direct funding for the payment of teacher salaries, and about 4 per cent of schools have taken up this option. However there is still strong resistance by teacher unions, and indeed by many trustees, to the wholesale introduction of such a system.

Early in March 1997 the results of a survey of primary principals by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) were published in national newspapers. The following headlines and key points summarise the current perspective of this sector New Zealand principals.

> **'Principals of schools 'close to crisis point'.**
>
> School principals say they are at the end of their tether and many would like to leave the profession.
>
> **Key Points**
>
> - Principals' workloads have increased substantially since the Tomorrow's Schools reforms of 1989.
> - Morale among principals is low: 34 per cent want out.
> - Recruitment is a problem: few teachers want to be principals.
> - A Council for Educational Research report sees the solution as lying with better funding and more support for principals plus a slower rate of change.
>
> (Quaintance, 1997, A19)

How has the situation reached this level of concern ? An examination of the early stages of the administrative reforms is useful here to identify the issues as they first arose.

Recognition of Change: The 'Picot' Era

During its second term (1987-90) the New Zealand Labour government, committed to financial austerity by an ailing economy, implemented dramatic changes in social policy. Education was included in these changes. The then Minister of Education, Russell Marshall commissioned a task force (Task Force to Review Education Administration, 1988) to investigate the process of educational administration and to recommend any changes. The recommendations and their implementation were radical. By October 1989 the regional Education Boards had been disestablished and schools were being administered by the principal and an elected board of parent trustees.

Although there was ambivalence amongst principals about the extent of the proposed reforms (Harold, 1995) there was also a recognition that new roles were required in the reformed educational environment. The editor of the *New Zealand Principal,* for example, alerted colleagues to the impending changes, but also reinforced the need for the maintenance of a strong professional role (Morris, 1988, p. 3):

> Over the next year or two your principal's job is going to be more crucial to your school and community than it has been in the past. Remember that our job is going to be very much of a public relations officer and that if parents are properly handled and have confidence in us their attitude will, in turn, be positive towards teachers as we change our role and head towards that of a chief executive...We must hold on to our vision of the sort of place that the school we are in should be. We should share this vision with all the children, teachers and parents because if we are going to successfully lead our schools and communities into the type of educational institutions that the Picot committee envisage, we will need the help and confidence of all in the community.

That volume and the one following contained several articles on the theme of the changing role of the principal. Perhaps the most critical was that of Grace (1989) who drew on the experiences of British educators to illustrate the implications of the reforms for principals. He reminded principals of the tension between the respective ideological positions of government and teachers and suggested five principles which could assist them to adapt to their new role. These were:

- Greater professional confidence
- Greater professional clarity and interpersonal sensitivity

- Greater professional unity
- Greater professional resourcefulness, and
- Better communication networks

Grace (1989, p.9) concluded that the "post-Picot educational world [ran] the risk of becoming too much absorbed into a market economy culture which might reduce education to...a commodity". In his view it was the principals of New Zealand who would influence the future of education.

A new element - courses of study about managerial and professional roles - also emerged during 1989. One such paper was offered as part of the Advanced Studies For Teachers (ASTU) programme run by Massey University. It was advertised as being "especially designed for principals in Primary and Secondary schools seeking guidance on their new roles in tomorrow's schools" (*New Zealand Principal*, 1989). The paper offered a mix of professional and managerial topics such as 'effective leadership', 'business and resource management', and 'the leader of the people' role.

During the implementation stage of the reforms a range of support and development programmes were offered to principals but their worth varied (Harold, 1995). Indeed, some principals were already familiar with the requirements of community consultation (Ramsay et al, 1990) but their skills were seldom recognised by those in authority. Such attitudes reflected the prevalent political view that education professionals had 'captured' the system and should not be involved too closely in plans for its reform.

A further theme in issues of the *New Zealand Principal* at this time was that of stress management; recognition of the increased workload accompanying the reforms. The dramatic increase in workload and its accompanying increase in negative stress was evident from the outset (Harold, 1995). The impact of this particular factor has been unabated since the reforms began.

Another issue emerging in the early stages of the reforms was concern about their potential negative effect on the career chances of women teachers. A study by Court (1989), for example, found that women teachers in middle management had skills which were not always valued or taken into account when leadership positions were filled. Another concern was that conservative rural boards would not appoint women principals; the numbers of women taking up those positions had been slowly increasing prior to the reforms.

By 1991 the Ministry of education had moved to the 'second wave' of educational renewal which was the introduction of curricular reforms. A new national curriculum framework was developed, supported by extensively rewritten curriculum documents. Three of these - English, Science and Mathematics - have already been introduced to schools and the others are timed for implementation within the next three years. The speed of their introduction has placed a heavy workload on principals and teachers and the current Minister of Education has recently taken this into account by revising the dates of implementation to a slightly later period.

This then was the context in which principals were operating at the beginning of the administrative and curricular reforms. The next section discusses these early trends in light of current issues for principals.

The Changing Role of the Principal - Emerging Trends

Workload and Stress

From the outset, principals were ambivalent about the education reforms. While welcoming the increased autonomy many expressed reservations about the likely workload, and possible misuse of power by parent trustees (Harold 1995). Concerns about workload were certainly realised as the entire administrative responsibility for school operation fell on the shoulders of the trustees and principal. The disestablishment of the regional Boards left the principals as the sole group with institutional knowledge which was heavily drawn upon by the incoming trustees. For teaching principals the load was onerous. Although the ministry introduced some measures, such as relief time, to assist teaching principals with their combined administrative and teaching responsibilities, workloads remained high and this issue is still evident today (Ashton, 1996; Wyllie 1997). The result has been an exodus of principals from teaching positions. Some have left for health reasons, others have taken a voluntary demotion (e.g. to deputy principal positions in larger schools), and some have moved to new occupations.

Recently completed research (Wyllie, 1997) paints a rather gloomy picture of principal workload and morale and indicates that little has changed in this respect since the introduction of the reforms. Her study showed that primary (elementary) principals' workloads have increased by an average 10 hours a week to 59 hours, that teaching principals work an average 5 hours longer per week trying to balance the differing aspects of their role, that many schools are not adequately resourced to provide relief for the principal, and that many

schools relied heavily on voluntary work by their boards. Half of those surveyed described their morale as low. A third of them said they planned to retire, take a break from teaching or change careers.

Early findings from current research into principal stress and conflict resolution (Anderson 1997) indicate that this element is of concern to many principals. Anderson surveyed 82 primary principals and conducted indepth interviews with 8 of these. He found that principals face conflict resolution scenarios on a daily basis, involving either staff, parents or students. Several of the principals reported that the greatest levels of stress are related to work with boards of trustees. Others noted that accountability to an 'on site' board of trustees (employers) was higher than under the previous system where there was a physical and psychological distance from the regional Education Boards. This perspective echoes earlier findings by Harold (1995) which indicated that previous policy could no longer be taken for granted and principals and trustees did not always agree about what should replace it. Principals were sometimes in the difficult position of defending previous policy against new, often unanticipated, views of trustees, while trying not to upset their working relationship with the board.

Despite the heavy workload there has been an overwhelming acceptance of the decision-making autonomy available at the local level (Ramsay 1993). Principals and their boards, within a raft of Acts and legislative guidelines, have full responsibility for all aspects of school operation, from the setting of budgets to appointment of staff and control of property maintenance. The principals in Wyllie's (1997) study did not indicate any change in this perspective but the teaching principals in particular required a much stronger level of resourcing and administrative support - and recognition by authorities that it was vital - if they were to do justice to their increased responsibilities. This view was echoed in the comments of an educational consultant[1] who commented that when she ran workshops about new policy requirements non-teaching principals frequently attended alone, whereas teaching principals were nearly always accompanied by their trustee chairperson, and sometimes other trustees. The consultant surmised that the reason for the latter was that teaching principals had to continually try to share new tasks because they had less time to spend on them than their non-teaching colleagues.

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[1] Personal communication between writer and educational consultant colleague, 11 March 1997.

New Relationships With the Community

As Ramsay and colleagues (1990) point out, school-parent-community involvement is not a new phenomenon in New Zealand and indeed has been a characteristic of rural schools in particular. A national study of the impact of the administrative reforms on schools (Mitchell and colleagues, 1993) included school-community relationships as one of its areas of inquiry. A significant number of responses indicated that a subtle but important change in parental attitudes towards the school, and in staff and trustee attitude towards the parents was beginning to occur. Several of the board members reiterated the importance of their role in ensuring wider parent views were represented, and many principals and teachers referred to a greater awareness of the reality of parental involvement in the 'new' educational environment (Harold 1993).

While there is recognition of the value of school-community partnerships, and indeed the reforms were underpinned by this principle, the reality for principals has not been clear cut. The writer's detailed ethnography of three school boards (Harold, 1995) showed clearly the complex interplay between national local and personal agendas, and the extent to which principals worked toward a 'negotiated order' in their relationships with trustees. The study found that the twelve months following the election of the new boards were characterised by a continued negotiation of new roles and relationships between the principal and other trustees. Five factors impacted on the negotiation process and on the implementation of official requirements. These were: the principals' respective management styles, arising from their perceptions of role, status and power; trustee perceptions of their role and powers; the relationship between the principal, the board and the community; the boards' relationship with educational authorities; and the adequacy of resources to support the reforms. These factors continue to feature in principal-board relationships to the present day.

Principal-trustee issues have been arguably the biggest single source of conflict especially where overlap occurs between governance (the role of the trustees) and management (the role of the principal). Although such problems will never be entirely eradicated, there have been surprisingly few examples of major conflict within the range of schools, although some highly publicised incidents have occurred at a few secondary schools. Nevertheless, the impact of even small-scale conflict can be stressful for principals in any sector. In 1995 the Principal's Federation surveyed 416 departing principals, from a total of

2300 primary principals. Fourteen percent of the 267 who responded cited 'conflict' as a reason for departure. While the survey did not categorise the types of conflict, the percentage of responses indicates the impact of such factors on principal morale.

In addition to the establishment of new relationships with parent-trustees for the administration of the school, principals are finding that the concept of relationships with the community under the parameters of 'the self-managing school' has expanded in meaning to include the potential for commercial and entrepreneurial connections. These have tended to be relatively few in number, occurring mainly at the secondary school level and are partly at least driven by economic realities, as principals look for ways to supplement their operational funding. They have involved such diverse activities as school-business links, sponsorship of school activities by local businesses, and increasingly, the enrolment of full-fee paying students from Asian countries. These partnerships, which fit well with the 'market' view of education, have drawn some principals into new aspects of their role. Another example of the move into a more entrepreneurial role is the proliferation of information brochures and media advertisements about particular schools, and signs at school gates advertising the school motto or mission statement and sometimes special after-school programmes. Many principals feel a tension, however, between the requirement for a market-driven/competitive approach to education inherent in the self-managing schools model of the reforms, and the cooperative/noncompetitive ethic which underpins their professional role (Lovegrove 1994; Strachan 1997).

Women Principals

Despite earlier concerns, the impact of the reforms in the 'New Right' context has been less severe than expected. In the primary sector, in particular, the appointment of women principals has continued in similar patterns to before 1989 and has showed some growth in urban areas. In the primary sector, for example, the percentage of women principals has risen from 19 in 1989 to 32 in 1996. The percentage of those in secondary principal positions has also increased from 19 per cent in 1989 to 25 per cent in 1996. Female principals have also held high office in their professional associations. For example the current office of president of the New Zealand Principals Federation is occupied by a woman, and a female secondary principal has just concluded a three year post as chairperson of the Post Primary Principals Council.

Although research into women in middle management has been occurring for some time (e.g. Court, 1989, 1992), research into gender issues for principals is relatively new in New Zealand. A significant study has recently been completed by Strachan (1997) who used interviews, observation and document analysis to provide detailed case studies of three feminist women secondary school principals operating in the new educational environment. She found that all three had adapted successfully to the new context and that personal value systems and their school's socioeconomic context were key factors in shaping their diverse approaches to leadership. Despite some personal cost - long hours, and less time for their families- Strachan's (1997) principals "were optimistic about being able to bring about change despite the heavy workload pressures" (Strachan 1997 p. 225). Strachan also found that each of her principals used strategies of *resistance, agreement* and *appropriation* to adapt to the tensions inherent in the 'New Right' context, where they agreed with some elements but disagreed with others. Strachan (1997, p. 83) comments that:

> ...the practice of feminist educational leadership in a 'New Right' context will probably be characterised by its complexities and tensions. These complexities and tensions arise because there could be a number of aspects of the education reforms that 'fit' with feminist educational leadership, and a number that may be antithetical and so may be resisted. Those aspects that 'fit' appear to relate to their educational leadership role (being learner centred), those aspects that are 'antithetical' appear to relate to the shift away from that role towards a more managerial focus. It appears that if resistance is chosen as a response to managerialism this may be difficult and the feminist educational leader may experience some personal and professional isolation.

Strachan's (1997) study has identified the need for further research into the leadership styles of women principals and into alternative models of leadership, but also suggests that principals who identify as feminists may face obstacles in the realisation of their educational philosophies. Strachan (1997, p. 81) warns that:

> ...according to Codd (1993) school leaders in general were forced to change from a commitment to social justice to a commitment to pursuing goals of individualism and competition. If Codd is correct then school principals who identify as feminists may well find a contradiction between how they would prefer to lead (for example, sharing power and co-operating) and that which is being asked of them (for

example, competing and individualising). In such a climate, many of the feminist ideals supposedly embedded in their leadership philosophy may be difficult to realise.

The New Zealand experience shows that initial fears that the educational reforms would stifle women in their move to principal roles have not been entirely realised. Nevertheless both primary and secondary women leaders still have some way to go before their representation in principal positions equals that of their numbers in the education workforce.

Employer roles

A key change for primary school principals under the reforms was their new role as employer of basic scale staff. Under the law principals can take sole responsibility for the employment of this category of teacher, but must involve their trustees in the appointment of senior staff. In reality, most principals involve their board in most appointments. Research in the early stages of the reforms (Harold, 1995) showed that the hiring and firing of staff was a contested issue for many trustees who wished to have greater powers in this area. Theirs' and principals' actions are tightly constrained by employment legislation, and this may be a factor in the relatively few problems that have arisen in teacher appointments. Ironically, given the current crisis of teacher supply in New Zealand, the concern for many principals has been simply to attract enough good quality applicants.

Secondary principals have long had responsibility for staff appointments so the changes in this area have been less marked for them. However the new and more complex legislative requirements such as performance management, attestation, accreditation, and negotiation of individual and collective employment contracts have led to a much greater level of accountability and workload. Principals and trustees are expected to be familiar with 22 parliamentary Acts in order to govern within New Zealand legislation.

Political Roles

The compulsory sectors of the New Zealand education system have long been characterised by strong affiliation to either of two teacher unions - the New Zealand Educational Institute, (NZEI) in the primary sector, and the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) in the secondary sector.

Prior to the reforms principals were eligible for membership of the same union group as their teaching staff, and despite changes in employment law and attempts by the Ministry of Education to separate principals from their staff by placing them on individual rather than collective employment contracts, many principals retain membership of their respective union associations. The NZEI national executive, for example, is comprised almost exclusively of principals and is outspoken on a broad range of professional as well as industrial issues. Both NZEI and PPTA have principal councils within their structures which allows for a focus on principal issues, and may reflect principals' preference to be part of an ongoing professional context with their teacher colleagues. The New Zealand Principal's Federation (primary sector) and its counterpart. the Secondary Principals Association of New Zealand, also attract large memberships and provide further opportunities for the establishment of a political and professional voice for principals.

New Zealand principals have always had the opportunity to take a political role - mainly through their union affiliation - but the nature of that role has changed somewhat since the advent of the 'self-managing schools'. Examples of principal resistance to, negotiation, and contestation of political agendas have been evident since the beginning of the reforms (Harold 1995). Sites of contestation have tended to occur when there is tension between Ministry of Education policies and the reality of local issues.

An early example of widespread principal resistance occurred in 1990 when, after extensive community consultation, principals submitted their school charter[2] document to the Ministry late in 1989. During the summer vacation the Minister of Education took legal advice about potential difficulties inherent in designating the charter as a contract between schools and the Ministry, and directed his officials to alter the status of the charter from a contract to an agreement between the main parties. When principals and trustees were finally informed the result was anger and cynicism on their part. Many initially resisted signing the new document and the situation took several months to resolve.

A further example occurred during 1996 in New Zealand's largest city, where immigration policy has, until recently, resulted in rapidly increasing numbers of children from Asian countries entering classrooms. Principals in

[2] The charter document was intended, within the overall national guidelines for education, to define the purposes of each school and the intended outcomes for students .

some areas of the city were faced with unprecedented demands for programmes of assistance in learning English, but existing Ministry policy provided only limited resources in support. The principals responded by stating that they would refuse further enrolments of Asian children until the Ministry provided appropriate language resources. The protest, which was technically illegal, made the headlines in several newspapers, caused political embarrassment, and also led to a period of tension between the schools and the Asian community, but resources were increased.

More recently the issue of school reviews has caused political controversy. The Education Review Office (ERO), which is independent of the Ministry and directly accountable to the Minister of Education, is responsible for monitoring the performance of schools and boards and issues public reports of its findings. Principals are sensitive about these reports as they may impact on the 'image' of the school and its ability to attract students. Principals are vigorously debating issues such as media reports of negative aspects of reviews (which has had damaging and unjust results for some schools in low socioeconomic areas), the quality and expertise of reviewers, the emphasis on criticism rather than constructive advice, and the lack of recognition of the value of self review by schools. An indication of the level of concern is reflected in a recent headline which read "ERO likened to the Inquisition" (Matheson, 1996) Evidence is also mounting of growing disparity between 'rich' and 'poor' schools (Gordon, 1994; Thrupp, 1996) further adding to principal and trustee concerns about the appropriateness of some ERO judgements. Such concerns have resulted in a promise by the recently formed coalition government to review the Education Review Office itself!

Leadership vs Management

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the reforms has been the tension between the leadership and managerial components of the principal's role. The administrative reforms required principals to develop complex managerial skills which, for many, were new and challenging. Teaching principals faced constant tensions between the time required for administration and the professional requirements of implementing a classroom programme and providing professional leadership for their staff. The curricular reforms followed closely on the administrative ones and brought new demands for principal and trustee accountability for student achievement. The charter document had signalled these with its mandatory objectives for equity in the delivery of curriculum. More recently the Ministry

has introduced a set of National Education Guidelines to complement the curriculum documents. These guidelines include 10 National Educational Goals (NEGS) covering aspects such as equal educational opportunity, the advancement of Maori education initiatives, assessment requirements and respect for the dual cultural heritage of New Zealanders. In addition boards of trustees, through the principal and staff, are responsible for implementing the National Administration Guidelines (NAGS) which include aspects such as the analysis and removal of barriers to learning, the provision of a balanced curriculum, and the maintenance of individual records. Principals are ultimately accountable for ensuring that their staff are complying with these requirements. The development of seven entirely new curriculum documents, with a very short timeframe for implementation has put enormous pressures on principals, trustees and teachers as they have struggled to cope with the pace of change. Indeed the theme of rapid change has permeated the reforms and has been one of the greatest challenges for those involved.

A worrying trend in the operation of New Zealand schools in the neo-liberal environment as the policies of choice take effect, is the growing disparity between schools in differing socioeconomic environments which in turn affects the ability of principals to effectively implement curricular requirements. Thrupp (1995) contends that the social 'mix' of student intakes creates conditions which can impact in positive or negative ways on student achievement and that until this is recognised a reliance on 'market factors' will lead to unjust assumptions about the success or failure of schools. His research also highlights the dilemmas facing principals in low socioeconomic areas where the school may be expected to, or indeed may wish to, take on extra responsibilities for student welfare that may impinge on the time available for academic requirements. Such dilemmas reflect differing principal perspectives on wider social issues affecting their students and raise important questions about equity in the delivery of the curriculum. This aspect needs to be more widely debated in relation to the impact of school reviews.

It is reassuring to note that, despite the pressures of the reforms, principals still place a high premium on their professional role. Wyllie's (1997) research showed clearly that principals viewed themselves as professional leaders ahead of their managerial role An action research study by Robertson (1995) provides further support for the professional role of principals. Her principals

used peer partnerships as a means of professional development and Robertson found that the process provided the principals with benefits in four major categories; enhanced critical reflection, increased professional interaction, educational leadership development and the provision of a structure for school development.

The call for increased opportunities for principal professional development has been heard in several quite disparate quarters such as the School Trustees Association, Colleges of Education, and the Principals Federation. The Education Review Office has also recommended, following several critical reports, that principals need more professional development. In addition, recent Ministry of Education contracts have been let to develop programmes of leadership and management for principals and trustees. There seems little doubt that the present focus on professional development will continue for some time.

Conclusion

It is now almost a decade since the educational reforms began, and in that period the role of New Zealand principals has undergone some significant changes. It would be wrong to leave readers with an impression that the outcomes have been entirely negative. While many principals have left the service many more are performing superbly in the new environment and others are coping well given the circumstances described above.

For secondary principals the changes in role have been less dramatic as they already had considerable decision-making autonomy prior to the reforms. It is in the primary sector that the changes have been most marked as principals adapted to a raft of new administrative and leadership responsibilities. Teaching principals have felt the burden of the reforms most of all and it is imperative that officialdom recognises this and provides stronger levels of support and resources to assist them to manage their tasks more effectively.

It is important also to bear in mind that there is huge diversity in the extent and nature of principal responsibilities. New Zealand schools vary in size from very small rural sites run by a sole charge principal to large secondary sites where the principal may have leadership and management responsibility for 80 or more staff and over 2000 students. This diversity is apparent in their individual styles of leadership and management and within their approach to professional development (Harold, 1995; Robertson 1995; Strachan, 1997).

Principals have become more or less accustomed to the new environment but challenges still remain. Arguably the most important of these is the development of new models for professional development. A balance must be found between the personal responsibility inherent in the self-managing schools concept and the need for the state to support reform in ways that make it possible for principals to meet legislative demands.

A second challenge is that of the continuation of debate about the nature of the curriculum, and the social and educational roles of schools. New Zealand principals reflect wide-ranging philosophies and beliefs in their professional practice, but not all are comfortable with the directions in which the reforms are taking their schools.

A third challenge is to find ways of regulating the pace of change so that the negative effects of workload and stress are reduced.

The pivotal role of the principal in leadership and management of schools is amply supported in the literature and will continue to underpin the operation of schools. Empirical and theoretical studies must continue to explore the nature of that role in order to address the challenges outlined above and to understand new ones as they arise.

Predictions of the future for New Zealand principals are fraught with complexity but Alcorn's (1993) words provide a pertinent framework:

> The role of the school principal in New Zealand...is complex, time-consumi ng and demanding. It is also challenging and important...[Principals] must look forward without losing sight of the past in which their ideas were shaped. True education is about wisdom as well as knowledge and skills. It is a quality much needed by those who lead and manage schools and those who help prepare them for the task.

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